/5 cont./

175 and Simon the Canaanite for Imeretia and Abkhazia. Although the latter fell victim here to heathens, the seeds of Christianity scattered by him did not die without a trace; they sprouted in the course of two to three centuries, and the heathen world shone forth with the light of Christian teaching. On the place where Simon the Canaanite was killed, a temple was erected which [ქრონ] attracts a multitude of pilgrims even now.

We also have information from the Greco-Roman authors concerning Christianity in Abkhazia and Georgia. For instance, Procopius, an author of the end of the sixth century, says: "Christianity has nowhere been preserved in such a pure form as in Iveria /Iberia/." Further: "Since the reign of Justinian Augustus, the customs of the Abkhaz have been noticeably mollified because of their adoption of Christianity. Justinian sent to them one of his eunuchs, Everrat, an Abkhaz by birth, with the object of stopping the princes from producing castrates. Justinian also built in the country of the Abkhaz a temple to the Mother of God and appointed priests and saw to it that the latter spread Christianity" (1).

1. Brosset, Histoire de la Géorgie, St. Petersburg, 1856, 4to, II, p. 240.

The temple of the Mother of God mentioned by Procopius is the famous temple of Bichvinta (Pitsunda), which from the earliest times has played a prominent role, not only in the religious life, but also in the political life of the Abkhaz. The Abkhazian eristav /governor of a province/ /6/ Leon II, taking advantage of Georgia's weakness after two Arab military invasions, made himself independent of the king of Georgia, Dzhuansher, and assumed the title of King of Abkhazia in 786. As the capital of his kingdom he selected Bichvinta, where the Catholicoi were already installed. The independence of the Abkhaz kingdom lasted two centuries in all. David the Great, King of Georgia, being childless, adopted Bagrat III (980-1014), born of the marriage of Gurgen, the heir to the Georgian throne, and Gurandukhta, the daughter of George II, King of Abkhazia.

/40 cont./

782 prescribes a prayer to the water, which is thought to be the
755 cause of the illness. Since the protectress of the waters,
[791] the "Mother of Water," is a woman, a sinless old woman is invited to the ceremony.

776 A large, clear, inaccessible fresh-water lake is thought
to be the residence of the "Mother of Water"; she may also
[778] dwell in a pure spring, untouched by anything unclean, such as a pig, etc. The "Mother of Water" sometimes comes out of her dwelling to the shore, and at that time anyone may see her. This is how the Abkhaz describe this "Mother of Water." She is a most beautiful, bewitching woman; her locks are incomparable and chestnut in color; her eyes are laughing. The Abkhaz who has been bewitched by her talks
753 to his comrades thus: "Eh, brothers, I have been vanquished
776 by the 'Mother of the Water,' and from now on I no longer
539 belong to your society. Recently I rode into a dense forest and saw a table spread there under a big oak; a mirror and a lighted candle stood nearby; the 'Mother of the Water' was sitting in front of the mirror, smiling at her own beauty and combing her long hair, which reached the ground. My arms fell to my sides from exhaustion; I could not take my eyes from that wonderful vision. When she saw me, she quickly arranged her hair and came towards me. I felt giddy... Without a word she raised all ten fingers, asking me, 'Are you willing to be my husband for ten years or not?' I shook my head, but she would not stop, and with the proper number of fingers raised, she offered me in turn nine, eight, seven years, and so on /41/ of marriage. As I kept on refusing, she finally raised her last little finger and fixed her gaze upon me. I immediately gave my consent..." (1).

1. "Etnograf. pis'ma iz Abkhazii /Ethnographical letters from Abkhazia/," Konst. Machavariani, Droeba, 1884-1885.

755
782 The "pure" old woman who was invited to the ceremony,

/55 cont./

[755] [782] [326] sick man's accuser, taking off his belt to bear witness to the sincerity of his address to Shasha, approaches the anvil and utters a prayer in which he requests Shasha to deliver the guilty one from his ailment, with a pledge that after his recovery the sick man will come himself to beg for forgiveness from Shasha; then, leaving a piece of iron in the smithy, he goes to set the patient's mind at reast. If the sick man recovers, he satisfies the injured one and goes with him to the smithy, and, having put a small silver coin (no less than two rubles) on the anvil, thanks Shasha for his recovery; the ram, the bread, and the wine that he has brought with him are given to the blacksmith, from whom, after the prayer, he receives pieces of the ram's liver and heart; he sends these to his family as a token of Shasha's forgiveness. In company with his relatives, the injured party, and the blacksmith, he himself eats the food that was brought along in the blacksmith's house.

21.

The Prayer to Eyrig-aatsnykh

[679] [782] [776] [778] Eyrig-aatsny'kh is the patron of stealing, plundering, and robbery. Beyond the river Bzyb this deity is called Chugurukhnykh; all the Abkhaz setting out to steal among the Ubykh, Shapsug, and other mountain-dwellers used to bring offerings to Chugurukhnykh, whose altar, if this expression may be used here, /56/ was located on a cliff beyond the fortification of Gagra. Prayers to this god are offered only by those who practice the "arts" of which he is the patron. An offering of four cone-shaped loaves of bread is brought; a prayer is said over them, asking a blessing upon the enterprise and giving a promise to sacrifice something else to the god in case of success. The loaves of bread are taken along on the trip. The thank-offering consists of something of the stolen goods, and if a horse or a head of cattle is taken, the sacrifice consists of a lock of the stolen animal's hair;

/56 cont./

579 782 all this is hung on trees near the place where Eyrig-aatsnykh is believed to have his permanent abode.

22.

Anybs-nykha-dudryuphsh

776 Anybs-nykha-dudryuphsh is worshiped as the mightiest of the gods. Mt. Dudryuphsh is regarded as his abode. Those [778] who dare to climb this mountain are immediately punished with blindness; therefore prayers and sacrifices to this deity are offered at the foot of the mountain. As a deity, Anybs-nykha has no exclusive, professional field of authority, but he is worshiped as higher and mightier than all the other gods. [782] The arrangement of prayers and sacrifices to him is the same as to Sha-sha, with the difference that when an oath is taken in his name, the formula is "May Anybs-nykha send me blindness and every ailment . . . ," etc.

778 [823] Anybs-nykha's residence is under the exclusive supervision of the large Abkhaz family Ankhaë-Chichba. The Chichba have enjoyed this right for several generations; it is a source of great profit to them, since permission to bring sacrifices to this deity must be bought from them with presents. Not far from the top of Mt. Dudryuphsh, the actual abode of Anybs-nykha, a stone lies under an oak; on this stone the image of the Holy Virgin has been carved. All those who [782] take an oath must put a coin or something metal under this stone, and woe to him who is tempted to take anything away, even one little thing, from among the objects lying there!

23.

/57/ Christmas Eve and New Year's Eve

782 [796] [262] On Christmas Eve in every family chickens are killed and four kvakvari (small loaves of bread stuffed with cheese)

/58 cont./-

[731] [789] donkey is brought, which they cover with a white sheet and put the doll on it. One of the girls takes the donkey by the rein, while two others support the doll, and they set out for the place where the raft was made. The other girls accompany the procession on both sides, singing "dziva dziva [539] dzvari! Kva kva mykryld aphsh-akh ipha did shivait dzy khychik, dzy khuchik," which means, "To get water, water! To get rainwater; a red daisy! Son of the Lord, we thirst for a little water, a little water!" When they come to the river, they take the doll from the donkey, put it on the raft, and, setting the straw afire, let it float downstream; they then try to chase the donkey into the water, which, of course, requires no small effort. At last the donkey is dragged into the river, and, emerging on the opposite bank, he begins [825] to bray, which is considered the surest sign of forthcoming rain. If, however, the donkey fails to bray, the same ceremony is repeated anew on the following day or the next day after that.

25.

Saints

[776] [778] [184] Independent of the general worship of all the deities discussed above, the inhabitants of the villages of Lykhny, Lzaa, and Ilori are under the protection of saints, to whom the churches erected in those villages are dedicated; or, more correctly, who are under the protection of the churches themselves. In Lykhny each family invokes the protection of Anan-Lykhnykh (the Virgin Mother of Lykhny), in Lzaa, of Anan-Lzaanykh (the Virgin Mother of Lzaa, i.e., the cathedral of Pitsunda dedicated to the Holy Virgin), in Ilori, of Tsminda Giorgi (the cathedral of St. George). To invoke [782] [796] their protection, sacrifices must be offered, which are, in fact, brought by each family once a year on a Sunday evening.

[231] On the day set aside for the offering, the best year-old

/58 cont./

782 heifer is selected from the herd, and in the evening it is brought
231 into the house where the family that is invoking the church's grace has its permanent residence. A supper is prepared, consisting of cooked or roast mutton, and the whole family washes and puts on clean linen. The head of the family takes a wax candle in one hand and in the other the rope tied around the calf's neck; he addresses the /59/ cathedral with a prayer for his protection and that of his family; he states that the calf will be dedicated to the church and that all its male offspring will be sacrificed to it, and that, instead of heifers, rams will be sacrificed. After this prayer an incision is made in the calf's ear; from this time on it is considered inviolable and cannot be used for food. On the day of its dedication to the cathedral the calf must spend the night in the house with the family.

782 If an inhabitant of one of the three above-mentioned
778 villages moves away, he is obliged to bring an offering each year to the cathedral in the village of his birth. Girls from these villages who marry inhabitants of other villages are not exempt from this rule. They as well as their children are still regarded as under the protection of the cathedrals of Lykhny, Pitsunda, or Ilori and are therefore obliged to offer sacrifices to them.

M. Dzhanashvili

539 /A supplement on pp. 60-64, containing Abkhaz sayings and proverbs, is omitted in the translation; see foreign text./

[766 cont.] Then one tries to console the dead (angip'sngis) with prayer and sacrifices of meat and sour milk, which are laid on a cloth under a protective roof near some clothing and, in the case of female souls, trinkets, and begs for the recovery of the stricken person, who stands nearby and whose back is stroked for "deliverance" (azati).

When someone has drowned and his body has been buried, his soul is supposed to have remained in the water and must be fetched out. For this purpose they hang a leather shoulder-sack on a silk string over the stream in question, and men and women stand on the back singing and playing the harp to entice the soul into the sack. As soon as the soul has slipped in, a man jumps into the water and ties the sack shut, he then takes it to the grave and allows the soul to enter into its body through a hole.

[767] Religious beliefs and customs. Christianity is supposed to have been brought to Abkhazia, according to the Georgian chronicle of Vakhtang V, about 40 A.D., but apparently did not find favorable soil, since there are no reports of successful propagation until the time of the Byzantine occupation of the coastal cities. Emperor Justinian had a large church erected at Bitshvinta (pitzunda) where the Abkhaz Catholics and the Georgian governor then had their residence. At the end of the seventeenth century most of the Abkhaz were induced by the Tatars to take up Islam, and only the Samurakhan remained faithful to Christianity, but the many ruins of churches and monasteries are regarded by them as holy places to which they make pilgrimages and on which they take oaths. Also several customs may have a Christian origin: use of wax tapers and incense, colored Easter-eggs, respect for the sign of the cross, fasting, eating of pork, and the like. The Cherkess, in whose lands few remains of churches are to be found, gave up Christianity for Islam later than the Abkhaz; the Kabardin were converted to it toward the middle of the eighteenth century, and the others, under Turkish influence, toward the end of the eighteenth century. Both religions, however, have exerted as little influence as among the mountain Georgians, for the old indigenous beliefs and customs have never been given up.

The gods of the Abkhaz are very similar to those of the Osset (see pp. 86 f.). A supreme god (Antsar mz) is ruler over

3: Janashia I-5 (ca. 1900) 1937 RI3 Abkhas RI3
Adzvibzha

guardians, whose power extends to his descendants, but not to those of his brothers or sisters. In the village of Adzvibzha almost everyone is obliged to carry out this " praying to God ", Christians as well as Muhammadans.

Every Abkhaz keeps in his cellar, in honour of " God ", a special pitcher filled with must of the very best grade. However great his need, an Abkhaz will not, for any consideration in the world, open this " sacrificial " pitcher until the celebration of the cult of " praying to God ".[1] Early in the morning, on returning from the church, the head of the family surrounded by the male members of his household, sacrifices a young he-goat over the " sacrificial " pitcher, and entreats " the great God to receive graciously the humble offering made by him in accordance with the instructions of his forefathers . . ." He humbly entreats the Great God " punish us not for our faults and trespasses ", etc. After this the meat of the immolated goat is boiled, and sacrificial wheat-cakes are baked. All this is taken down into the cellar, and placed in front of the sacrificial pitcher. The members of the family kneel down, while the head of the family reverently cleans and opens the pitcher, and, holding in his left hand a hazel stick upon which the heart and liver of the goat are transfixed, he prays *Antwsa-du* (to great God) that He grant him and his family a long and happy life. In his prayer he never fails to mention that they are performing the rite " in the manner they were taught by their fathers and grandfathers ". Afterwards he fills a glass with wine from the pitcher and pours it on the heart and liver and the sacrificial cakes; he then passes the latter, with the wine, three times over the heads of the supplicants who are kneeling down, and says: " Grant us the warmth of Thine eyes and of Thine heart! Protect us from all infirmities and sickness." Then follows again the libation of wine Now they all rise, turn round from right to left, and each places a piece of frankincense on burning coals. For a few minutes they all stand still humbly, while the great God " receives " their offerings, and then, with strict observation of order of seniority, a glass of wine and a small piece of the heart and liver is given to each of the participants. It should be noted that only the household members are allowed to partake of these sacrificial offerings. Even the married daughters of the family are treated as strangers, and they are not allowed to share in the offerings with their husbands and children. It is sinful even to think of the sale of the wine. In most of the families the female sex is generally forbidden to partake of this offering.

Thus do the Abkhasians perform annually the domestic offering to God of " His share ". But every three to five years each Abkhaz

[1] The same applies to other " sacrificial pitchers " referred to below.

3: Janashia I-5 (ca. 1900) 1937 · RI3 Abkhas RI3
Adzvibzhq

is obliged to present "His share" (offering) to God, in a forest, for which purpose a clearing is chosen under the shadow of a tree, oak or yoke-elm. Here is offered usually a castrated goat the age of which is equal to the number of years since the Abkhaz last prayed in the forest. Women are not allowed to take part in this rite, although they help to prepare the sacrificial cakes. The prayer is said by the elder of the *gvari*, who receives the hide of the immolated animal. The offering takes place in front of *ashwamkyàt'* (described above). The prayer ceremonial is the same as in the case of the domestic offering, although the pitcher of wine kept in the cellar is not used; for the purpose of the oblation a little wine is brought in a smaller pitcher. All the men in the neighbourhood participate in the ceremony, and when it is over they seat themselves on the grass; herbage is placed in front of them, and on this is served the dinner. A small piece of the heart and liver of the immolated animal is given to each of the participants. All the sacrificial food must be consumed on the spot; nothing may be taken home. The horns of the victim are hung high above the *ashwamkyàt'* and left there. Three legs of *ashwamkyàt'* are then cut, and the assembly disperses.

Some families dedicate to *Antswakhwà* cows which are let loose with perforated ears (see above, p. 125); these cows are called *adzatwà*, which is difficult to translate; it apparently denotes "pledge", "security". Bullocks born of these cows are offered in sacrifice in place of castrated goats.

(*b*) *Aylòr-nàkha.*

On the same day, simultaneously with *Antswakhwà*, a sacrifice is offered to *Aylòr-nàkha* (*Ilòr-nàkha*). The ceremony of offering the sacrifice is exactly similar to that described above. There is the same "wine pitcher", goat, cakes, and the same manner of praying. Also, at certain intervals, the sacrifice is made in the woods, in the manner described above. Many keep *adzatw* cows in honour of the Ilori icon. The only difference being that women have a freer access to these offerings than to *Antswakhwà*. Here I will note that if the pitcher for the "sacrificial wine" becomes in any way damaged (even if only slightly chipped), a new one, larger and dearer, must be substituted without fail. This is a general rule for all pitchers of this kind.

Aylòr-nàkha (*Ilòr-nàkha*) denotes the "icon of Ilori". This appears to be the same icon of St. George, which is kept in the small, walled-in church of the village of Ilori. This village is situated on the seashore, three miles from Otchemtchire. What is this Ilori icon? Which saint does it represent? For what is this saint remarkable? The contemporary Abkhaz has no notion whatever. The masses do not know to this day that it is the image of St. George. All they know

3: Janashia I-5 (ca. 1900) 1937 RI3 Abkhas RI3
AdzVibzha

778 is that the Ilori " icon " is omnipotent, and they, therefore, try hard not to incur its wrath. It is inflexibly just and punishes harshly those who deviate from the law; it is a goddess of equity, as it were; a 778 kind of Themis, and in the practical life of the southern Abkhasians 622 and of the Samurzaqanoans, there is, therefore, no " saint ", no 690 " icon ", no deity equal to the Ilori " icon "; it determines finally and irrevocably all matters, whether civil or criminal, which the crown court has not been able to settle to the satisfaction of the popular idea of fair play. Even in the case of matters upon which judgment has been passed by crown courts, but where the decision has not satisfied the disputing parties, appeal is made to its tribunal. The trial is conducted as follows: A kind of arbitration court is set up which imposes upon 789 the accused the obligation to take a propitiatory oath before the Ilori " icon ". If the matter is unimportant it is determined by a village tribunal which provides one or two co-swearers; but if the matter is serious (insult to one's honour, murder, etc.) the representatives of the parties participate in the trial with the judges. " Swearing in " follows, but the number of co-swearers increases; thus, for instance, 1–2 *t'avadi-s*, 2–3 *aznauri-s*, 5–6 peasants, 1–2 namesakes, 1–2 maternal relations, 1–2 relations of the female line of the *gvari*, etc., are frequently appointed as co-swearers. The oath is administered on *Wednesdays* and *Fridays*. The accused swears before the icon that he is innocent, the co-swearers confirm his declaration, and there the matter ends. If the accused is unable to take the oath, he submits obediently to the punishment imposed upon him. From the day of the taking of the oath onwards the plaintiff breaks off all relationship with the defendant and his co-swearers. " The icon is between us (parts, separates us)," says the orthodox Abkhaz. It is impossible to evade this custom; it is an Abkhasian's profound conviction that infringement of this custom (the re-establishment of relationship), as also 696 a false oath, will not pass unpunished; the " icon " punishes with 653 sickness and even with death, if the accused does not come to his senses in time and confess himself in the wrong. At the death of all the members of the guilty family, the wrath of the " icon " recoils on the plaintiff. To avert the chastisement of the " icon ", as of Abkhasian gods in general, the guilty person must pray and make offerings to the " icon "; he must also compensate his opponent's material losses and obtain the latter's consent thereto; they both set out for Ilori with gifts, prescribed by sorceresses, and they pray there to the " icon " for forgiveness of their sins; they bring goats, bullocks, and money. This is called the reciprocal forgiveness-prayer (*eyba-nə̀khwara*). From this day normal relations are restored between the parties. If one of the parties does not agree to make peace, the other party can *akhə-dchəkhə̀ra*, " buy back his head," i.e. redeem

3: Janashia I-5 (ca. 1900) 1937 RI3 Abkhas RI3
Adzvibzha

himself, by placing before the "icon" also the amount he was to pay to the opponent.

Muhammadans also take the propitiatory oath at Ilori, together with the Christians.[1]

There are many stories current about the power of the Ilori "icon" to work miracles. I learned one of them from the lips of Biram Tkhazou and Seyt Zhania.

"In ancient times the Ilori 'icon' determined all the disputes of human mortals in the following manner. High up in the centre of the church, hung the golden scales of Justice. Under these scales stood the suitors, praying zealously to the Ilori 'icon', who inclined the scale over the head of the righteous. Knowing this, Abkhasians would not venture to break the law or wrong one another; peace and happiness reigned upon the earth. But men are cunning; an impious Abkhaz decided to deceive the great Ilori 'icon'. He owed a neighbour of his a hundred *manat'i* (= rubles) which he would not pay. The creditor complained. They both went to Ilori. When they appeared before the 'icon', the debtor handed to his creditor his staff which contained the hundred *manat'i*. The scale inclined towards the creditor, thus acquitting him of the charge. He took back his staff and left the church. The Ilori 'icon' was 'offended' and because of this fraudulence on the part of one Abkhaz it punished the entire people: the 'icon' took the scales of Justice to heaven for ever."

In ancient times the Ilori "icon" provided oxen for itself on the eve of the wake festival. The Commission assured me that eye-witnesses of this miracle were still living in Abkhasia, but none knew their names. As this providing of the oxen is described by A. Lamberti in the manner in which the Abkhasians relate it to-day, I will quote the description from his work.[2]

"On November 20th[3] they celebrate St. George's Day. A superstition prevails among the people that this celebrated martyr, on this day, procures for himself an ox from the neighbourhood and brings it by night into the Ilori Church dedicated to him. This church is held in great esteem, not only by all the Megrels, but by the neighbouring peoples also. Therefore it is very rich in gold and silver[4]—the icons are all made of these metals and are adorned, too, with precious stones; and even the doors are mounted in thick sheets of silver. So revered is this church by all the people, that, although situated

[1] In Northern Abkhasia *Dadwsp'sh* is endowed with a similar power.

[2] A. Lamberti lived as a missionary for eighteen years in Megrelia (1635–1653), and, according to him (and also to other sources), the present-day southern Abkhasia (Abzhua) constituted then part of Megrelia, the northern boundary being the River Kodor.

[3] The 10th of our (old) style.—N.J.

[4] At the present time, too, it is the wealthiest and the most influential of all the churches of Abkhasia.—N.J.

3: Janashia I-5 (ca. 1900) 1937 RI3 Abkhas RI3
AdzVibzhq

[189 539 [118] in a distant country place and near the sea-coast, thieves have never entered there, nor has any enemy ship raided it or despoiled it of its wealth. Indeed, so highly is this saint (the Ilori 'icon') honoured, that not only would the valuable contents of the church not be stolen, but, even if precious stones were scattered *outside* the church, in its vicinity, no one would touch them. (It is the same even to-day, N.J.) In addition to the local population, this saint is also feared by the Abkhazes,[1] and even by the Turks, deprived though they are of the light of Christian religion. They all worship, and fear, this sacred object (the 'icon', N.J.) . . .

"On November 20th, the Prince (of Megrelia, N.J.) goes to the Ilori Church accompanied by his court officials, nobles, and the people of Odishi (i.e. Megrelia), to participate in the feast of the 'ox'. Not only do the Odishians go there on that day, but also the Abkhazes and Svans, in great numbers. The church is enclosed in stone walls [346] about the height of fifteen spans. At its entrance are large gates surmounted by a beautiful campanile containing many bells. On the eve of the feast, in the dusk of the evening, the Prince, accompanied by a large retinue of bishops, princes, and nobles, rides up to these gates, orders them to be locked, then seals the keyhole with his own seal and returns home. The following morning, before dawn, the Prince, accompanied by the same retinue, again rides up to the gates. When they have assured themselves that the seal has not been tampered with, the Prince removes the seal and opens the gates. Within the Church walls, the ox is found. At the sight of this miracle, the people, with great fervour, offer up their thanks to St. George, and the church bells ring out the glad tidings of the miracle all over the country-side. Everyone is firmly convinced that St. George himself provided the ox and led it with his own hands into the enclosure. Also, it is said, the saint leads the ox thrice from the mountains to the sea and back, and offers the ox, thus sanctified, to the people as a gift . . .

"A long time ago, so it is said, an unbeliever (the Abkhazes say that he was a Muslim from Trebizond, N.J.) came here from a country many hundreds of miles away from Odishi. After witnessing the miracle and how the people celebrated the occasion, this obstinate man not only disbelieved, but began to mock the Christians, telling them that they were light-minded and foolish enough to believe anything. In spite of his attitude, the people tried to persuade him to embrace the true Faith of Christ, and unanimously affirmed that all the miracles of St. George were really true. 'Very well, then,' said he, 'I will do this. At my home, two hundred miles away, I have an

[1] In Ilori the Megrelian language prevails to this day; many, however, know Abkhasian also.—N.J.

3: Janashia I-5 (ca. 1900) 1937 RI3 Abkhas RI3
Adzvibzha

ox of a certain colour. If the miracles you talk so much about are true, it should be an easy matter for St. George to bring my ox into this church to-night; then, certainly, I will gladly embrace your Faith.' The condition was accepted. On the following morning, early, on opening the gates, there was found within the enclosure an ox which the unbeliever recognized as his own. Thus he was convinced of his error, and embraced the Christian Faith."[1]

(c) *Indl-qwùba.*

The *T'avadi*-s Marshania, and all those Abkhasians who descended from the mountains (Dsabalaa, Dalaa, Pskhvu, etc.), offer sacrifices (a ram, without fail) in exactly the same manner to a sanctity, *Indl-qwùba*, instead of to the Ilori "icon". I could obtain no information of any kind about this "icon". Everybody I questioned gave the same answer: *Indl-qwùba* is equal in power to *Dədərəp'sh* and the Ilori "icon".

These offerings are performed early in the morning, and serve as breakfasts. Every Abkhaz slaughters some animal for the meal (the favourite one is a castrated goat), it is often prepared on the Saturday. They also pay the customary Paschal visits. After the midday sacrificial meal they all go to the public square, where they indulge in games, chiefly football. During Easter week they also organize horse racing, the most popular sport of the Abkhasians.

7. *The Second Day of Easter*

This is a commemoration day. A variety of dishes are prepared, all of which are placed on a table by an open window. The eldest of the family, holding a candle and a glass of wine in his hands, prays to the souls of deceased relatives that they grant his family peace and happiness. Then follows the pouring of wine on the meat and wheat dishes. The whole family stand behind the supplicant. After the prayer each member approaches, places a piece of frankincense on burning embers, and pours wine on the food. Here stands too a smoking pipe. All remain seated in silence, in order that the souls of the deceased ancestors may eat in peace.[2]

The Abkhasian, as has already been stated, have no Paschal greeting such as "Christ is risen". They welcome each other with a kiss, saying: "May God grant us that we meet again next year," to which the other replies: "And for a hundred years."

[1] Quoted from the Russian and Georgian translation of A. Lamberti's *Relatione della Colchide hoggi detta Mengrelia nella quelle si tratta dell'Origine, costumi e Costi naturali di quei Paesi*. Published in Naples, 1654.

[2] This rite will be described in detail in my work *The Cult of the Ancestors*.

3: Janashia I-5 (ca. 1900) 1937 RI3 Abkhas RI3
Adzvibzh9

8. *Thursday of Easter Week*

(*dsatchòkhur, mardyàni t'argyalàz*)

796 On the Thursday of Easter week the Abkhasians offer a sacrifice [796] to *dsatchòkhur, mardyàni t'argyalàz*. I do not know what the first word denotes. *Mardyàni* is the Megrelian *mardiani* (Geo. *madliani*) and denotes "beneficent", "blessed", "abundant"; while *t'argyalàz* is derived from the Georgian word *mt'avar-angelozi*, archangel; it is not clear, however, which of the archangels is meant. According to the explanation of the Commission, this "icon" punishes the offending family by causing the death, in particular, of children. "If there are children in the family, it does not touch the adults," commented the Commission. Sacrifice to this "icon" is always offered by an oak tree. On the Thursday, early in the morning, sacrificial cakes are baked, and the whole family repair to their oak, which is usually situated nearby within the enclosure. Everybody kneels, [789] facing eastward, and the head of the family makes a bloodless offering consisting of *akwakwàr* and cakes, and entreats the great Dsatchkhur, the beneficent T'argialaz, to forgive them their trespasses, voluntary or involuntary. *Àämen* say the whole family. The oak tree is decorated [794] with pieces of many coloured stuffs, some fastened with nails and [778] some with wax. This oak is sacred and to fell, damage, or defile it is strictly forbidden.

On the same day, in the evening, but this time at home, the family [780] make a blood offering to *T'argyalàz*. A fattened capon is immolated and cakes are again baked. Some families keep pitchers with "sacrificial wine" in his honour.

"In ancient times when people were not so depraved, T'argialaz [789] procured for the day of offering a wild he-goat as his victim," Osman Kamkia informed me, "just as the Ilori 'icon' procured an ox. Now he no longer does so, for we are not worthy of his favours!" concluded the old man, sighing. The peasants Kamkia are *me-khat-ur-n-i* (Geo.), i.e. "attendants of the 'icon'." They keep a little cottage (*p'atskha*) [778] where the "god" is supposed to dwell invisibly. A money-box is kept in the cottage, into which the faithful drop copper coins used exclusively for the purchase of sacrificial offerings.

An old Megrelian, whose name has unfortunately become effaced in my note-book, told me the following:—

778 "The all-powerful and miraculous icon, Dsatchkhur, was removed 789 by the Svans from the Salkhino church, and taken to Svanet'i, where it remained for a long time; in the end, however, moved by pity for the Megrelians, the icon returned of its own accord and alighted on an oak which stands on the picturesque hill of Salkhino. Near this

3: Janashia I-5 (ca. 1900) 1937 RI3 Abkhas RI3
Aàzvibzha

oak the Megrelians built a church in its honour, in which this icon rests to this day. It has not forgotten the Svans whom it often visits." My Megrelian informant is an inhabitant of Salkhino.

9. *Àhwsa-rəmshap'*

Abkhasians call the first Sunday after Easter Low Sunday, *Àhwsa-rəmshap'*, i.e. Pascha for women. This day is set apart for public games. Early in the morning everybody assembles in the public square where they indulge in all sorts of sport, chiefly, however, horse racing and tournaments. Next day the Abkhasians go back to work, and ordinary life is resumed.

The public games (on holidays) are continued till Whit Monday.

10. *Àdsyla-nəhwa*

In connection with *Àmshap'* mention may be made of two supplications, *Àdsyla-nəhwa* (cf. III (*d*)) and "*Supplication of the Leybaa*". I have not been lucky enough to have witnessed the latter ceremony, which, by the way, belongs to a cult of the Bzib Abkhasians.[1] The worship of the tree, so picturesquely described by ancient writers, such as Strabo, Procopius of Cæsarea, is preserved in a most conspicuous form with its sacred grove, in this supplication of the Leybaa *gvari*, as is also the name of the deity, in that of *Àdsyla-nəhwa*; *Àdsyla* denotes tree, *nəhwa* (*anəhwara*), praying, supplication. The deity of the tree itself is called *Àdsyla-intswakhwə*, wherein the latter part denotes "his (of the male rational being) part of god, deity". The Abkhasians in their religion personify and "intellectualize" all manifestations of life, and they strictly distinguish the gender of each of them.

In order to protect wanton children who roam about without restraint, and love to climb trees, the Abkhasians make offerings to the "spirit of the tree", entreating the "great part of the deity of the tree" to guard their children against falling off trees and hurting themselves. The objects offered are capon and cakes. The oak (*a-j*) they consider as the sacred tree, to which they make the offering; walnut-trees (particularly the hazel-nut-tree) and yoke-elms are "pure" trees. If someone falls from the tree they must dig up some coal from under the spot where the person fell; if no coal is found, the accident is regarded as serious; and the person will not survive the fall. An offering is also made to the "spirit of the tree" in the case of certain illnesses, as directed by sorceresses, the sick person being supposed to have fallen ill through having incurred the wrath of the spirit.

[1] About this see the article by N. Pateypa, in the *Collaborator of the Transcaucasian Mission* (in Russian), 1912, pp. 107–112, 124–7.